PORPHYRY

TO MARCELLA

THE LETTER OF PORPHYRY THE NEO-PLATONIST

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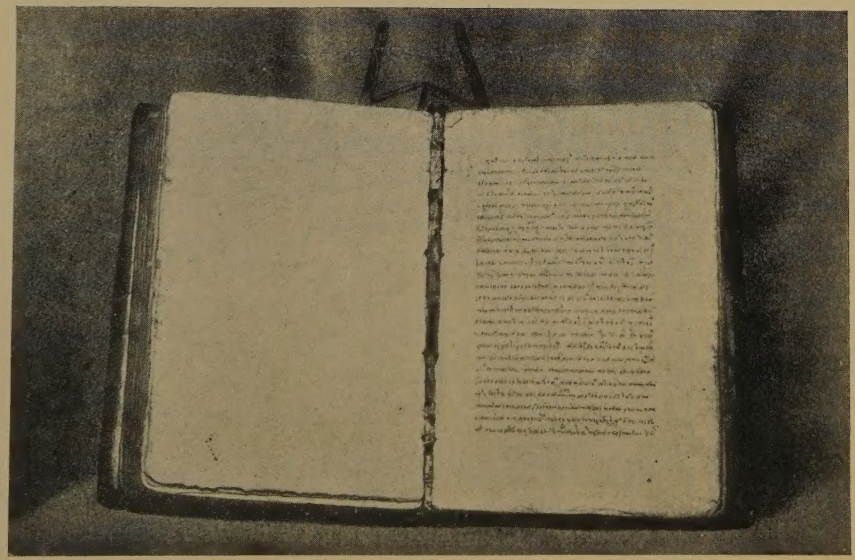

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Porphyrius.

PORPHYRY

THE PHILOSOPHER

TO

HIS WIFE

MARCELLA

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION BY

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PREFACE

No body of men should attract more interest, and within certain limits more sympathy, than those who in the third and fourth centuries stood forth as the champions of the creed and civilisation of the ancient world. It is true that they failed to understand their age; it is also true that to the believer in that Providential government of the world known to the philosopher as "the survival of the fittest," the fact that their cause was lost is sufficient proof that in its own brief day it was not fitting that it should live. So it had been with Brutus and Cassius, more endeared to posterity by their generous errors than Augustus by his surpassing

fortune. It is true that, with the sublime exception of the Emperor Julian, these men were not of heroic mould ; that for the most part they were as far below the martyrs of the Roman Republic in character as they transcended them in virtue of their cause. There are nevertheless two bright exceptions to the general taint of imbecility, in Plotinus and his pupil Porphyry, whose epistle to his wife Marcella forms the substance of this little volume.

The strongest impression which a reader of this epistle is likely to receive from it is one of admiration of its lofty morality and deeply religious spirit. In both these respects it may be paralleled with any Christian work of its age ; and it possesses two distinct advantages over all such writings in (save for a little trifling with the pleasing idea of guardian angels) its entire freedom from superstition and its perfect disinterestedness. It is evident that a section at least of the ancient world had, independently

of any Christian influence,* attained to an exalted moral and religious standard by the beginning of the fourth century; and it becomes an interesting question why men in Porphyry's position could do so little, not merely to preserve the antique civilisation, but to prevent the general corruption of society, Christian and Pagan alike. The answer, as it seems to us, may be best conveyed by the observation that, in Porphyry's time, Christianity and philosophical Paganism were changing places; and that the exchange, though ethically advantageous to Paganism in the world of thought, was materially destructive to it in the world of fact.

From one point of view, it may be said that but two religions exist in the world—the religion of the flesh and the religion of the spirit. The former is, of course, susceptible of innumerable gradations, from the

* It is possible that Porphyry's four principles of faith, truth, love, hope, may be adapted from St. Paul's faith, hope, and charity. But this is very doubtful, and there is no other trace of indebtedness to the New Testament, although citations from earlier philosophers are numerous.

grossest fetishism to the most refined sacramental symbolism ; but at bottom these are all alike, agreeing in the fundamental proposition that something or other material—something to eat, or something to drink, or something wherewith to be clothed, or cleansed, or aspersed, or at least some ceremony visible if not tangible, is not merely an accident of religion, but of its very essence. When it is remembered that for countless ages primitive man could have had no other objects of veneration than material objects, and that usage makes heredity, and heredity the very mind itself, there can be no wonder that this is still the creed of the immense majority, and that the ancient religions in particular should have been surcharged with shows and rites hardly distinguishable from magical incantations. It is the glory of primitive Christianity to have swept away the heathen rites along with the heathen deities, and its good fortune to have been simultaneously delivered from the scarcely less burdensome

Jewish ceremonies by the opportune destruction of Jerusalem. The New Testament is anti-sacerdotal; the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" is anti-ritualistic; the early records of the Catacombs display dogma and ritual at their minimum. Manifestly, however, the standard of a small sect cannot be maintained as it becomes an extensive society. Every new convert brought of necessity his inherited modicum of heathen prepossession; and by the time of Porphyry the Church was becoming full of doctrines which would have aroused the horror of the primitive Christians, and ceremonies which would have excited their ridicule. By this process, nevertheless, deformed as it might be from the point of view of its original beauty, it was becoming a power in secular things. During all the period an exactly reverse movement had been going on in philosophic heathenism, which, though still trammelled by external veneration for an official creed, was, under Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Porphyry himself, growing

as unworldly as Christianity in its purest days. The ascending and descending buckets had met in the well, and hung for a moment in equilibrium; but every day altered this balance to the disadvantage of philosophy. Porphyry's profound consciousness of the mutation of things breathes throughout his treatise. Though nominally a professor of the religion of the State, he writes like the teacher of a conventicle. He addresses a select flock, a *stille Gemeinde*. The prohibition to seek after riches practically excludes the commercial classes from the sphere of his influence: the prohibition to enter into controversy debars the philosophical church from extending itself by missionary effort, as the Christian was doing every day. More significant still, Porphyry has lost confidence in the State. "The conventional law," he says, meaning thereby the jurisprudence of the public tribunals, "is subject to expediency, and is differently laid down at different times according to the arbitrary will of the prevail-

ing government." This was very nearly the position of the primitive Christians, except that they were animated by the expectation of a supernatural renovation of the world in their own time. Porphyry could entertain no such fallacious belief, but for want of it his outlook on the world's affairs is discouraging; and his morality, though most spiritual, is not sufficiently "on fire with emotion." Philosophy is retiring into the cloister from which Christianity is emerging.

It is evident, then, with all our admiration for Porphyry's sanity and disinterestedness, so infinitely above the current Christian theology of his day, that he could not prevail in his contest with the latter, nor was it for the world's interest that he should. Philosophy had lost the power of guiding men in the mass, just at the time when it was most imperative that that power should be exerted. It certainly seemed for a space that the failure of Christianity would be even more disastrous. It is incontestable that Christianity has not

always at first proved an unmixed benefit to the nations which have adopted it. The degeneracy of Saxons, Franks and Celts,* as soon as the new religion had become firmly established among them, can be no merely accidental coincidence. But the evil wrought among these was nothing to the general collapse of patriotism and public spirit throughout the Roman Empire under Christian influences. In theory the regenerated converts ought to have surpassed their ancestors in every virtue ; in fact, they sank to a lower level than Greece or Rome had known in the worst of times. Nothing can be more comical, only that nothing can be more tragical, than the attitude of St. Augustine, calmly sitting down to plot out a heavenly city in the midst of the ruin of the earthly city which he had helped to bring about.

* A striking illustration of the lowering of the standard of heroism and honour among the Irish, consequent upon the introduction of Christianity, may be found by a comparison of the story of Maeldun, in Joyce's "Old Celtic Romances," with the ancient heathen legends that precede it.

But in every case the remedy came through the infusion of fresh unspoiled blood, and the same agency which had destroyed the old order proved itself adequate to control the new. It is obvious that the Goths, Vandals, Alans, Heruli and Gepidæ, could not have profited greatly by the instructions of Porphyry; and that a prescient Providence had done wisely to create the only instrument by which, so far as we can see, they could have been "subdued to the useful and the good;" at the cost, it must be admitted, of truth and beauty which the world can ill spare. But Providence, as Peer Gynt justly observes, "is not economical."

Porphyry and his compeers had their day of resurrection. If the thirty Christian controversialists who had contended with him in his life could have returned to earth near the end of the fifteenth century, they would have found the object of their animosity, with other similar objects, enthroned not very far

off the Fathers as commentators on the Greek Scriptures, Plato and Aristotle. So it has continued, so it may continue for ever, for the ancient battle-field has shifted, or rather sunk into the earth. We have spoken hitherto as though Porphyry and the Christians were irreconcilably at variance, but in truth both were agreed upon a πρῶτον ψεῦδος, which lay at the root of their respective faiths. Both were sure that things were not as Heaven intended them to have been; they differed respecting the explanation: the Christians holding that the world had incurred a curse from which it needed redemption, Porphyry deeming that every human soul had literally "tumbled" out of light into darkness. This imaginary fall, it will be observed, is the very keynote of this treatise. Both views, it need not be said, are diametrically opposed to the teaching of modern science, which, without disputing the undeniable fact of the existence of moral evil, explains it as the survival of qualities useful, and indeed necessary, while

man was passing through inferior grades of being, but unlovely and noxious in the condition which he has now attained, and more and more so in proportion to every advance of which this condition may prove capable. This is no mere ingenious speculation, but a truth pregnant with the most important ethical results. To Porphyry and his contemporaries, the moral constitution was mainly the concern of the individual. Science, by asserting its physical origin and physical transmission, makes it a concern of the race. Hence a conception of duty to posterity, surpassing in grandeur and cogency any incentive to right action which either Porphyry or his opponents could conceive ; hence, too, that present universal and irresistible shift of religion from a theocentric to an anthropocentric attitude of which every thinking man must in our time be conscious. These circumstances lend especial interest to Porphyry's views on human duties, and it is deeply to be lamented that the only extant

manuscript of his treatise fails us just as he is entering upon the subject. So far as he has proceeded, he has spoken only of the duties of the master towards the slave. His precepts are admirable as such, but he has not delved to the root of the matter; he sees nothing intrinsically wrong in the ownership of man by man, and has no conception of freedom as the inalienable prerogative of every human being. That so excellent a moralist should have been unable to perceive in the fourth century what is plain to every civilised man in the nineteenth, is of itself a sufficient demonstration of the reality of human progress.

RICHARD GARNETT.

British Museum,
October 1895.

INTRODUCTION

In the year 332 B.C. Alexander the Great, flushed with the victories of Granicus and Issus, took Tyre after a seven months' resistance, besieged and captured Gaza, and marched thence in undisputed course to the frontier of Egypt. Here he conceived a mighty scheme: the foundation of a city, which should be the centre and keystone of his rule, where Europe, Asia and Africa should meet and hold communion, where the best intellects of the known world should assemble, where the greatest of kings might show that he was also the pupil of the greatest of philosophers.

Thus Alexandria came into being with its two splendid harbours, its Pharos, the wonder of the world, its magnificent public buildings. Alexander himself marked out the circuit of the walls, the direction of the principal streets, and the sites of the numerous temples. But he never saw the city

completed ; and, instead of his throne, it sheltered his tomb.

It was left for his successor in Egypt, Ptolemy Soter, to make Alexander's dream a reality. His desire was to collect about him an aristocracy of intellect—the wise men of the world. And they came ; for Ptolemy could offer them that with which even wise men cannot dispense—honour and security, and but little of these fell to their lot in those troublous days of Greece. Thus originated the celebrated Alexandrian Museum and the even more celebrated Library. Thus there grew up a second Athens, but an Athens tainted by Oriental luxury, which could not tell proudly of its "love of beauty free from extravagance."

This beautiful city at the meeting-place of three continents was a fitting home for all that was best in Art, Science, and Thought. It was natural that Philosophy should revive in this genial influence, and that, side by side with the dream of an universal State should grow up the vision of an universal philosophy, one that should contain within itself all that was essential in all philosophies, should penetrate to the essence of things, and show that the main features of all were identical.

The history of ancient philosophy resolves itself into a continuous contest between Idealism and Materialism ; and the balance sways backwards and

forwards between them according to the spirit of the age each school represents. The Stoic and Epicurean schools represented a reaction against the mere formalism of the later Academicians and Peripatetics. But in the more luxurious days that followed, Epicureanism degenerated into a mere cult of pleasure, against which reaction was inevitable. Stoicism held its ground the longest, and accommodated itself by internal changes to the changing spirit; until at last it too succumbed before the newer teaching.

The centre of the new doctrine was Alexandria. After the conquest of Egypt by Rome in 29 B.C. this city lost some of its political importance, but it became more than ever a centre of cosmopolitan learning, where Greek and Roman, Jew and Egyptian contributed their quota to the intellectual life. The philosophers who founded Neo-Platonism, really desired to revive the teachings of their master Plato in their pristine purity, but this was no longer possible. Just as the State was no longer purely Greek, but a combination of Roman, Greek and Eastern elements, so it was natural that these other influences should tell on thought; and that, instead of pure Platonism revived, the result should be an eclectic system, combining in itself the best of all its predecessors.

The form this philosophy took was a more or less religious one; indeed there would seem no reason why we should not apply the term Religion to many of the developments of Neo-Platonism, since its prominent features were ethical, and its fundamental principle was the need of direct communion with the Deity by faith and not by reason. The whole spirit of Neo-Platonism may be summed up in the longing for a mystic union with God. Whether this mysticism was a purely Greek development, or whether it was due in part to intercourse with Oriental nations, is a point much disputed, and which it is not necessary to consider here.

The greatest of all the Neo-Platonists, the master whose doctrine was reflected and expounded by Porphyry, was Plotinus, the most metaphysical, most mystical, most incomprehensible of all. He flourished in the third century A.D. But the problems he faced had already been considered by others. The Neo-Pythagoreans, as faithful followers of their master, had preached the value of asceticism as a purifying agency—a doctrine that formed an important item in the Neo-Platonic creed. In the domain of metaphysics, some of them had already ventured on the expedient of combining two systems, in attempting to reconcile the ideas of Plato with the Numbers

of Pythagoras. Both the eclecticism and the asceticism are important features of Neo-Platonism. The link between Neo-Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism was supplied by Plutarch (50–120 A.D.), who aimed at a purer conception of God. This very purification necessitated the assumption of another power. Since unity and goodness are the properties of God, multiplicity and evil cannot be attributed to Him. Hence Plutarch finds himself obliged to admit dualism. What to the Jews was Satan, to the Christians the Slanderer, to the Persians Ahriman, to Empedokles Strife, to Aristotle Negation (*στέρησις*), to Plato "the other" (*θάτερον*), was to Plutarch the first principle of evil. The unity of God causes another difficulty. How can He be brought into contact with humanity? This necessitates the assumption of intermediate beings, and these too became a dogma of Neo-Platonism. But the aim of the philosopher must always be to purify his soul that he may be directly united to God.

Stoicism too contributed its quota. Originally a materialistic system, it was becoming imbued with Platonism; and we find the distinction between soul and body emphasised, and the metaphor of the body as a prison, while the need of some external help to virtue was beginning to be felt.

The Jewish element which is undoubtedly

traceable was due chiefly to the great Philo. Unconsciously the Jews absorbed the ideas of Greek philosophy, and read them into their own Scriptures, maintaining, and doubtless believing, that they read them out of them. They believed in an opposition between the divine and the terrestrial, and in an abstract conception of good, which, however, they materialised into a concrete Jehovah. The intermediate beings they found ready to hand in the angels of their Scriptures. To these Philo adds the *Logos*. The great infinite indivisible Deity has two special attributes—goodness and power. The third, which combines and unites them, is the Logos (Thought or Reason), for it is through this that God is good and powerful. The Logos becomes the mediator between God and the world, the ambassador of God, who communicates His message to man, the interpreter of His will, the viceroy who accomplishes it, the instrument through which God created the world; on the other hand, he is the representative of the world in its relation to the Godhead, the high priest who intercedes for it, the idea of ideas, united to the intelligible prototype of the world. Philo further combines Platonic myth and Jewish Scripture in his doctrine of the Fall. The descent of soul into body is the fall of man; his task in life is by philosophy to rise above and out of the body, and

be united once more with pure spirit, free from carnal desire.

This doctrine of the Fall was a cardinal point of Neo-Platonism. Nowadays one of the chief points of difference between philosophy and theology is the question as to the Ascent or Descent of Man. Evolution tells us that we have risen, and shall rise still further, if not the individual, at least the race; theology maintains that the human race has fallen from a condition of innocence, that we are born in sin and must strive by divine help to regain our lost purity. Not reason nor our own power can make us virtuous, but only direct help from above. Revelation and original sin are the orthodox doctrines of theology, and they are essential elements of the Alexandrian teaching.

Philo might find the doctrine of the Fall in the early chapters of Genesis, and in many passages of Plato. The Phædo tells how the baser souls become entangled in bodies and are drawn down to earth; and they, and not the divine power, are responsible for the misfortune of their birth. Nothing can save them but philosophy, and turning away the soul from the things of this world. "For if a man had always on his arrival in this world, dedicated himself from the first to sound philosophy, and had been moderately fortunate in the number of his lot,

he might be happy here, and also his journey to another life and return to this, instead of being rough and underground, would be smooth and heavenly."*

In Plato philosophy includes virtue, and the moral is that the virtuous man must be happy in this world and the next. But the Alexandrian philosophers went beyond Plato. They introduced a mystical element foreign to him, and probably due to Oriental influence. God could not be approached merely by reason or virtue, but the pure soul might grasp Him by direct contact, might in rare moments be united to Him and one with Him. Thus Neo-Platonism assumes a theological character, and the Alexandrian movement in some of its aspects tends towards the foundation of a universal religion.

But, though many of its elements are found scattered among earlier systems, yet it was not a mere patchwork of older teachings. It was a complete metaphysical system, built up by dialectic, and confessedly based on the teachings of Plato, though including much that is foreign to him. The real architect of this scheme was Plotinus, and, as such, he may claim the title of founder of Neo-Platonism, though it was his master Ammonius that first pointed out the way.

* Plato: Republic X, 619 E, Jowett's translation.

INTRODUCTION

Plotinus was born at Lykopolis in Egypt in 204 A.D. So at least we have reason to believe, but the great philosopher himself always refused to tell the date and place of his birth, since he did not desire to dwell on the details of that great misfortune, the descent of soul into body. At the age of twenty-eight, being inspired by a desire to study philosophy, he visited the leading schools of Alexandria, but nowhere could he find the teaching he sought for. At last a friend took him to the school of Ammonius Saccas; and, on hearing him, Plotinus exclaimed: "This is the man I am seeking."

Ammonius is accounted by some the founder of Neo-Platonism. Originally a Christian, he had abandoned that doctrine for the teaching of Plato, and was endeavouring to refound Greek philosophy on the double basis of Plato and Aristotle. He was a poor man apparently, and had followed the trade of a porter, but his wisdom drew around him many of the best minds of his time. He designedly abstained from committing his doctrines to writing, herein following the example of the older Pythagorean schools; and he exacted a promise from his disciples, that they too would not divulge to the world at large his more secret doctrines. His chief pupils were Origen, Herennius, Longinus and Plotinus. Herennius is said to have first broken his oath, and the others followed.

For eleven years Plotinus sat under Ammonius Saccas ; then he set out for the East to study the wisdom of Persia and India. At the age of forty he settled in Rome, and there opened a school of philosophy. Even before the edict of Caracalla had conferred the rights of citizenship on provincial and Italian alike, the Imperial city had learnt to welcome the great minds of the other nations over whom she held sway. Rome was the intellectual as well as the political centre, and every form of philosophy, every religion but one, was held in honour and found followers here.

In spite of the abstruse nature of his teaching, crowds flocked around Plotinus. Men of science, physicians, senators and lawyers came to hear him ; even Roman ladies enrolled themselves among his disciples. Rich men dying bequeathed their property to him, and left their children in his charge, so that his house was filled with youths and maidens. The Emperor Gallienus even proposed to rebuild a Campanian city, to bear the name Platonopolis, and be administered by him on the principles of Plato's Republic. This popularity of an abstruse philosopher is a curious and perhaps unique phenomenon ; and we can but ask whether Plotinus may not have condescended a little to his audience, and reserved his inner doctrines for a privileged few.

Many anecdotes are told of Plotinus and his

admirers. He possessed in a strong degree the power we now call thought-reading. On one occasion a rich widow of his acquaintance had lost a valuable necklace. Plotinus undertook to find the thief, called up all the slaves, and at once named the culprit. At another time he guessed and frustrated Porphyry's intention of committing suicide. He also foretold the future of all the lads committed to his care. He entertained the greatest contempt for his body, and refused to allow any portrait of himself to be taken. When pressed on this point, he answered: "As if it were not enough to bear this image, with which Nature has surrounded us, you think that a more lasting image of this image should be left as a work worthy to be inspected." However, a painter, who was one of his admirers, studied his countenance during the lectures, and produced his portrait from memory. Those who knew him say that he was fair to look upon, especially when his face was lighted up by the inspiration of speech. His hearers seem to have been duly impressed with his ascetic principles; and it is amusing to read how one Roman senator was unintentionally cured of the gout by resorting to a low diet, in order to free his soul from the thraldom of the body.

Plotinus died in 269 A.D., in the sixty-sixth year of his age. He met his end with rejoicing, and

desired his friends to celebrate the day with gladness. His last words were, "I am striving with all my might to return the divine part of me to the divine whole which fills the universe." After his death his disciples consulted the oracle of Delphi as to the place of his soul, and were told in answer that it had escaped from the fetters of the body, and now shared the lot of the higher demons, striving ever upward in everlasting bliss.

Plotinus wrote in all fifty-four books, and the task of editing and revising these fell to the lot of his greatest disciple, Porphyry. Thanks to his industry and devotion, the Enneads have been preserved; and this monumental work has maintained for posterity the leading tenets of Neo-Platonism.

Its main theses had been enounced by its predecessors, the opposition between matter and spirit, the evil nature of matter, the necessity of extricating ourselves from the body. These are assumed without further proof, but Plotinus with his wonderful metaphysical power describes, with many intricacies, the hierarchy of heaven and earth, traces in detail the line of beings intermediate between the Supra-Rational, the Highest Being (*τὸ πρῶτον*), the primal First Cause, which is Rest and Unity, to which no attributes may be ascribed, since attributes imply multiplicity, and the creatures

of the phenomenal world, which are sinful, moving, ever changing. He distinguishes two spheres, that of Intellect and that of Sense. Between the two comes the Soul ; it is the outermost circle of light that surrounds the primeval light; outside all is darkness. The world-soul must be distinguished from the soul in man. Yet even these are not divided; only the bodies in which they dwell are distinct.

In the world of Sense unity is changed into multiplicity, harmony into strife, pure reason into a mixture of reason and necessity, eternity into time, being into seeming and a flux of becoming. Matter is the basis of everything sensual, and it is the source of all evil, as the divine Being is the source of all good. Yet Plotinus was too much of a Greek to deny the beauty of the world. It must be beautiful, he says, because it is part of the general harmony ; but it is impure, because it belongs to sense. On this very point of the beauty of the world he combats the Christians, and in spite of his own ascetic tendencies, blames their contempt for the world, probably because to him it seemed aimless and meaningless. Evil in his eyes is weakness, a negation rather than an existent thing ; evil action is a failure in the attempt at right, therefore it needs no devil to prompt it.

Plotinus describes at great length the history of the soul before it enters the body. In reality souls

enter bodies, because they are the links between two worlds, and the tendency is downward. Here he follows Plato. The soul is immortal, the body is mortal ; a very bad soul may perish, a very good soul may ascend to the stars ; average souls enter bodies again. Death separates soul and body, but it does not help the soul to rise, unless it has freed itself from earthly taint by philosophy. The aim of the philosopher is therefore to separate soul and body by ending the desire of the soul for the body. Hence Plotinus does not approve of suicide, for nothing would be gained by this violent separation. "There is," says Porphyry,* "a twofold death, the one indeed universally known, in which the body is liberated from the soul ; but the other peculiar to philosophers, in which the soul is liberated from the body. Nor does the one entirely follow the other." The beauty of the world has an ethical value. It kindles desire after the good, and thus we may "rise on stepping-stones" from sensual to highest beauty.

Plotinus does not deny a subordinate importance to practical and political virtues. But far above them are the theoretical or contemplative, by which the soul, freed from evil, freed even from thought, is united direct to the Highest Being. This is the

* "Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Natures, I." translated by Thomas Taylor.

condition of ecstasy, to which Plotinus is said to have attained four times in six years. These moments of ecstasy are short and rare, and the direct upward path is on the same line as the downward.

The teaching of Plotinus is an esoteric doctrine ; his spiritual beings may be identified in the teaching of the vulgar with the gods of the popular religion. He has a preference for this, as the doctrine of his own country, but he is conscious that the esoteric teaching of all religions is the same, and hence is tolerant towards every other. The multitude cannot attain this divine contemplation ; they must pursue the lower path of the practical virtues.

Such are in very brief outline the cardinal doctrines of Plotinus. That they were ever made known to the world is due largely to his favourite pupil, Porphyry. It was he who induced his master to break his vow, and write books to clear up points that were left obscure. Plotinus' writings filled fifty-four books, and it was these that Porphyry arranged in six *Enneades* (groups of nine). We learn that Plotinus never revised a page, and both wrote and spelt badly ; hence his disciple's task can have been no sinecure, and he well deserved the epithet bestowed on him by Eunapius, "a kind of Mercury's chain let down among men" to com-

municate to them the learning and wisdom from above.

Porphyry was a Tyrian of good descent. He was born in the year 233 A.D. He early showed a fondness for travel, which seems to have been a characteristic of the philosophers of those days, who ranged from country to country, in search of the teacher at whose feet it should be most profitable to sit. There is some uncertainty about the list of his teachers and the places he visited. He studied under Origen, perhaps at Cæsarea, and he seems at one time to have visited Alexandria. At Athens he heard Apollonius and Longinus. At the age of twenty he went to Rome, attracted by the fame of Plotinus, but found that the great master had closed his school and returned to the East. He then went back to Longinus, and sat under him for many years, becoming at last the chief ornament of his school. Longinus was a man of such great learning that "he was accounted a kind of living library or walking study."* He was more of a critic than a metaphysician, and he did not go with the Alexandrians on all points, and refused to follow Ammonius when he went beyond the limits of Platonism. It is to him that Porphyry owes the name by which we know him. His real name was Malchus—in the Syro-Phœnician language a king-

* Eunapius, translated by Smith.

and Longinus bestowed on him the title Porphyrius (πορφύριος), either as symbolic of the royal purple, or, as some say, on account of the favourite colour of his garments.

At the age of thirty, he once more set out for Rome, this time as a confirmed disciple of Longinus, and, apparently somewhat uplifted by spiritual pride, if, as Eunapius assures us, he travelled to Rome, "that he might measure the worth and greatness of the city by the wisdom he found in it." Here he soon came into conflict with Plotinus. Having actually ventured to attack one of the master's dogmas in a written treatise, he was assailed in his turn by Amelius, one of Plotinus' disciples. A written controversy ensued, from which Porphyry issued converted—a result rare surely in the history of controversy—and ever afterwards he continued the most faithful and orthodox of Neo-Platonists. So dear did he become to his master, that the greater part of Plotinus' books were actually written in answer to Porphyry's questions, so perhaps it was but fair after all that Porphyry should have the task of putting them in order.

For six years Porphyry sat under Plotinus, and listened to the doctrines of the evil of matter, the baseness of body, and the greatness of the philosopher's task. At last despair at the smallness of his

own powers came over him, and "he conceived a hatred of body, and could no longer endure the fetters of mortality." *

"Thus at the same time abandoning the causes of his sorrow and delight, away he hastened to Lilybæum, where he lay bewailing himself, and macerating himself with hunger, and abstaining from all manner of food, and withal from all human conversation. Nor was the great Plotinus out of the way in his conjecture of what was become of him. He tracked him therefore by his footsteps, and searching diligently after the young fugitive, found him where he lay all alone in a sad condition; at which time, with a wealthy store of comfortable words, he recalled his soul just ready to take flight from his body, and strengthened his body to receive his soul. And thus revived, he returned to himself again, and wrote down in a book the discourses that passed between them." †

Such is Eunapius' version of the story, but there are others which state that Plotinus sought Porphyry out in Rome, and advised him to go to Sicily, thinking perhaps that rest and change might help him to shake off his melancholy. There is a good deal of obscurity about the details of Porphyry's life, for it does not seem as though any faithful

* Thomas Taylor, "Introduction to Select Works of Porphyry."
† Eunapius, translated by Smith.

disciple had done for him what he did for Plotinus, and given the world an account of his master. It seems agreed that he remained for some time in Sicily, and Christian writers assert that his time there was spent in writing fifteen books against their doctrines. From Sicily he passed to Carthage, and thence returned to Rome after the death of Plotinus. Here he taught for some years, and here, in 302 A.D., he married Marcella, a Roman lady, the widow of a friend. Nothing further is known to us about her. There is a conjecture that she had once been a Christian, and that after her marriage she reverted to her early faith. The evidence for this is a passage in Porphyry's collection of oracles (*περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας*), quoted by St. Augustine and others, in which a husband asks the oracle by what means he may turn his wife from Christianity. The answer is that it would be easier to write on water or fly through air than to recall her erring mind. There seems, however, no ground for supposing that this refers to Porphyry's wife, and the evidence of his own words in his letter to Marcella seems sufficient to disprove the hypothesis.

In order that there should be no mistake about the motives that prompted his marriage, Porphyry seems to have explained that it was no mere commonplace love nor the desire to promote his

own domestic comfort, or to have children of his own, but because she had a disposition suited to philosophy, and because he desired to give her a home and help her bring up her seven children. Ten months after the marriage the husband was called away on some business which he describes as connected with "the affairs of the Greeks,"* and the will of the gods. And this journey has given rise to many conjectures. A passage of Lactantius deals with the persecutions endured by the Christians of Bithynia in the year 302. In these, he says, two men took a leading part, one of whom professed to be a high priest of philosophy (*antistes philosophiæ*), but was in reality a man of vicious habits, who hunted after wealth, while preaching the beauty of poverty. It has been suggested that the person here alluded to was Porphyry, and that he had been sent hither by the Emperor Diocletian to put down the Christians. The slander, for such we may surely consider it, is of old standing,† but the discovery of the letter to Marcella, in which he hints that his journey was taken for religious reasons, has given some fresh colour to the story.

Perhaps the best refutation may be found in the language used about him by his Christian oppo-

* Letter to Marcella.

† *Vide* Holstenius, "Vita Porphyrii."

nents, who certainly had no reasons to deal gently with him; and yet bear full testimony to the nobility of his character. Whoever the unworthy philosopher may have been, we are surely justified in believing the vices and excesses described to be incompatible with the asceticism and simplicity of life which Porphyry is known to have practised, and which he is not likely to have abandoned at the age of sixty-nine. He might have seen no objection to persecuting the Christians, since their religion was the one exception to his rule of universal toleration, but he had other means of attack at his disposal, if it is true that thirty Christians were required to refute his writings against them.

The latter part of Porphyry's life is largely lost in obscurity, but it seems certain that he returned once more to Rome, and died there. Of the manner of his death we know nothing. Even the date is uncertain, but it was probably about 305.

It was during this last absence that he wrote the letter to his wife, which was completely lost for so many centuries, and was only discovered in 1816 by Cardinal Mai, when searching for manuscripts of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the Ambrosian Library at Milan. It aims at impressing on Marcella the consolations of philosophy, and it bids her not grieve for "the absence of him who sustains thy soul, and is to thee father, husband, teacher and

kindred," since it is but the "shadow and visible image" which are absent, while if she can learn to ascend into herself, "collecting together all the powers which the body has scattered and broken up into a multitude of parts, unlike their former unity, to which concentration lent strength," then soul may meet soul in all purity, and distance be annihilated. Thus his attempt at consolation becomes a text, on which to hang a simple version of his philosophy, suited to the feminine understanding, and it thus supplies something like an easy abstract of Porphyry's ethical teaching, which he who runs may read.

The letter to Marcella suggests a religious treatise, and this is natural, since it was the ethical side of Neo-Platonism that attracted Porphyry, and his practical tendency led him to consider the conduct of life, as based on the teachings of his master.

The aim of philosophy is a moral life, the cure of moral evils, the purification of our activity. Knowledge is only a means of purification, not in itself an essential part of the highest life. The philosopher is the physician of the soul. The motive of philosophy is the salvation of the soul.

There is an essential opposition between matter and spirit, yet the world of sense has sprung from the world of spirit. The highest power produced

one below it, and so on in a downward course, in which multiplicity and evil increase, the further in the scale beings are removed from the great First Cause, for "everything which generates by its very essence generates that which is inferior to itself."* At last the soul which hovers between the two worlds inclines downwards, and produces a lower power akin to the body, which combines with it. Now this descent on the part of the soul is voluntary, just as in Plato it is the souls which are weighted by the corporeal that are dragged down again into the visible world.† It is the soul which seeks the body. "Nature indeed binds the body to the soul, but the soul binds herself to the body. Nature therefore liberates the body from the soul, but the soul liberates herself from the body." ‡

Before ever the soul entered this earthly life, it dwelt in the heaven of the fixed stars. Thence it descended to earth through the seven planetary spheres, clothing itself from their substance with an aërial body (*πνεῦμα*). This accompanies it when it leaves the earthly body, and is fashioned according to its preference for some earthly form. The purest souls receive ethereal bodies, the next class solar, the third class lunar bodies. Those

* Porphyry, "Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Natures," I. Translated by Thomas Taylor.

† Phædo. ‡ "Auxiliaries."

lowest in the scale, who have weighted their πνεῦμα by the damp mists of earthly atmosphere, are drawn down below the earth. The pure souls have a merely spiritual existence, free from desire, imagination, and remembrance of earthly things.

It follows that the aim of the philosopher must be to rise to the height of these pure spirits. Since body is opposed to soul, since love of God cannot be combined with love of the body, the aim of life must be the purification of the soul, and its liberation from the bonds of the body. This is not attained by death alone, but by freeing the soul from a longing for the body.

There are four classes of virtues: the political virtues, the purifying virtues, the intellectual virtues, the contemplative virtues. The political virtues tend to moderate passions, the purifying to withdraw the soul from earthly things, the intellectual then enable man to turn towards the First Cause, but the contemplative lead him straight to God. "The political virtues therefore adorn the mortal man, and are the forerunners of purifications. The virtue of him who proceeds to the contemplative life consists in a departure from terrestrial concerns."* "He who energises according to the practical virtues is a worthy man; but he who energises according to the cathartic (purifying)

* "Auxiliaries," II.

virtues is an angelic man, or is also a good demon. He who energises according to the intellectual virtues alone is a god, but he who energises according to the paradeigmatic* virtues is the father of gods."†

The last contain in themselves all the rest, but it is the purifying to which we must give most heed, for these lead the way to the others. It is these that shall set us on the first rung of the upward ladder, which can lead us back to the glory whence we came. "He who wishes to return to his proper kindred and associates, should not only with alacrity begin the journey, but in order that he may be properly received, should meditate how he may divest himself of everything of a foreign nature which he has assumed, and should recall to his memory such things as he has forgotten, and without which he cannot be admitted to his kindred and friends."‡ To attain this it is necessary that "we should divest ourselves of everything of a mortal nature which we have assumed, together with an adhering affection for it, which is the cause of our

* The *paradeigma* (παράδειγμα) is the First Cause—the great model and pattern of the universe. (See Plato, *Tim.* 28 C, *Rep.* 500 E.) The paradeigmatic virtues are those by which the soul becomes one with God.

† "Auxiliaries," II.

‡ "On Abstinence from Animal Food," I. Translated by Thomas Taylor

descent, and that we should excite our recollection of that blessed and eternal essence, and should hasten our return to the nature which is without colour and without quality, earnestly endeavouring to accomplish two things: one that we may cast aside everything material and mortal, but the other that we may properly return and be conversant with our true kindred, ascending to them in a way contrary to that in which we descended hither."* We must then "endeavour to the utmost of our power to withdraw ourselves from sense and imagination and the irrationality with which they are attended, and also from the passions which subsist about them, as far as the necessity of our condition in this life will permit . . . . We must therefore divest ourselves of our manifold garments, both of this visible and fleshly vestment, and of those with which we are internally clothed, and which are proximate to our cutaneous habiliments; and we must enter the stadium naked and unclothed, striving for the greatest of all prizes, the Olympia of the soul."

To attain this end we must tread the path of asceticism, not merely abstaining from food, but also checking all desire for it. "For what benefit shall we derive by abstaining from deeds, when at

* "On Abstinence from Animal Food," I. Translated by Thomas Taylor.

the same time we tenaciously adhere to the causes from which the deeds proceed?" We must subdue our passions by abstinence from those visible perceptions which excite them.

"Among these passions and perturbations those which arise from food are to be enumerated."*

Thus to avoid excess in food is a help towards the higher life. We should especially avoid flesh food, because it weights and clogs our bodies, and —which is even worse—may introduce malefic demons into them. A vegetarian diet is to be preferred. Among other arguments against animal food, Porphyry introduces one in his treatise on the subject that must have been very unusual in that age—the injustice towards the animals themselves. He even speaks of them with some affection, and tells some of the little stories about their sagacity that are so common nowadays, but rare surely in the mouth of a Hellene—*e.g.*, "A lamprey was so accustomed to the Roman Crassus as to come to him when he called it by its name, on which account Crassus was so affectionately disposed towards it that he exceedingly lamented its death, though prior to this he had borne the loss of his three children with moderation." †

* "On Abstinence from Animal Food," I. Translated by Thomas Taylor.

† *Ibid.* III.

Abstinence from animal food is an act of justice, and—which is even more important—it is a help on the upward path, "since for that purpose it is necessary to exchange the life which the multitude leads for another, and to become purified both in words and deeds." *

The aim being a purer and higher life, every right means to that end should be adopted. It was this need of external aids that turned the later Neo-Platonists towards the help of religion. Porphyry is willing to tolerate the polytheism of the multitude, while himself accepting their gods as symbols, and giving an esoteric interpretation to their mythology. The wise men are the few, and they must not hold the opinions of the multitude concerning God, but they may join in the common worship, provided that their sacrifices are only "the first offerings of fruits that are used by men and cakes made of the fine flour of wheat." † Those whose thoughts are not pure should not speak of God, and even the pure-minded will say little, "for the knowledge of God makes discourse short." ‡ Sacrifice, though permissible, is of no special value either to giver or receiver. "We are not harmed by reverencing God's altars, or benefited by neglect-

* "On Abstinence from Animal Food," I. Translated by Thomas Taylor.

† *Ibid.* IV. ‡ Letter to Marcella.

ing them. But whoever honours God under the impression that He is in need of him, ignorantly supposes himself to be greater than God." "God is not in need of any one, and the wise man is in need of God alone." * Prayer is allowed with limitations. The highest God must not be invoked by the human voice. We may pray to the gods of the second class, but we must not ask anything unworthy of them. "For to each of the divinities a sacrifice is to be made of the first-fruits of the things which he bestows, and through which he nourishes and preserves us. As therefore the husbandman offers handfuls of the fruits and berries which the season first produces, thus also we should offer to the divinities the first-fruits of our conceptions of their transcendent excellence, giving them thanks for the contemplation which they impart to us and truly nourishing us through the vision of themselves which they afford us, associating with, appearing to, and shining upon us for our salvation." †

There seems a little inconsistency in Porphyry's tolerance of the popular belief in material deities; and his Christian opponents did not hesitate to accuse him of cowardice in refusing to renounce polytheism entirely. But Porphyry, like many another noble Pagan, shrank from Christianity as a

* Letter to Marcella. † "Abstinence," II.

revolutionary and uncompromising doctrine; and, while willing to see good in every national religion, such as the Jewish, Chaldæan and Egyptian, he remained to the last one of the bitterest foes of Christianity. It may be that the very points of resemblance between the two creeds tended to emphasise the differences, and unquestionably even amid the fiercest disputes they influenced each other strongly, though probably Zeller is right in thinking that Christianity borrowed more from Neo-Platonism than the latter from Christianity. Porphyry wrote fifteen books against the Christians. He was a formidable foe, for his knowledge of the Bible was wide and accurate, and he anticipated the German critics in discovering the late date of the Book of Daniel. It is believed that these books were purposely destroyed by his opponents; at any rate they have not come down to us, but those who are curious as to the controversy will find many references to it in the writings of St. Augustine. All that is impure and gross in the religion of the multitude Porphyry lays to the charge of evil demons. It is they who cause the belief that evil comes from the gods, and that they must be appeased by the sacrifice of animals. They do this that they may nourish themselves with the smoke from the altars; moreover, they are the authors of magic and of everything that is base

in connection with Paganism. Even for the multitude he desires to purify religion, and with a view to this he expounds the inner meaning of the Platonic and other myths, on which he lays great stress. But the true philosopher will take little heed of outward forms, for they do not concern him. Like the Stoic sage, "he is his own priest; he only is beloved by God, and knows how to pray."

Plotinus marks the highest metaphysical, Porphyry the highest ethical attainment of Neo-Platonism. After him it degenerated. The religious side preponderated, and with it elaborate interpretations of myths, magic, and the like, which tended towards a restoration of polytheism. At a later date in the schools of Athens the revived study of Aristotle led philosophy back to scientific principles. But its work was done, for Christianity had triumphed; it degenerated into mere scholasticism, and in this form dragged on an obscure existence until Justinian closed the schools of Athens in 529. But even then the end of Neo-Platonism had not come. The revived study of Plato at the Renascence produced new forms of it; and in our own day the Theosophists hold many of its tenets. As long as Plato is read and honoured—and that will be for many a long day—it is probable that he will receive fresh interpretations; and those who seek after signs and wonders will confound his

teaching with that of the later degenerate Neo-Platonists. For the intelligible interpretation of pure Neo-Platonism at its best Porphyry has done more than any other philosopher.

Unfortunately but few of his many works have come down to us except in fragments. "Rhetoric, grammar, numbers, geometry, music, philosophy, natural and magical operations" are named with magnificent vagueness by Eunapius as the subjects with which he dealt. Those that have come down to us fairly complete are—(1) A Life of Pythagoras. (2) A Life of Plotinus. (3) A treatise on abstinence from animal food (*περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων*). (4) The Cave of the Nymphs (*περὶ τοῦ ἐν Ὀδυσσείᾳ τῶν νυμφῶν ἄντρου*), an allegorical interpretation of a passage in the Odyssey. (5) Auxiliaries to the perception of intelligible natures (*ἀφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητά*), a sort of anthology, with comment, from Plotinus. (6) A letter to Marcella, of which the end is wanting.

Thomas Taylor the Platonist (1750–1835), who devoted so much loving care to a revival of Platonic study, has translated the third, fourth and fifth of these, and summarised the life of Plotinus. The letter to Marcella is not an original work, being full of quotations from Homer, Plato, Epicurus and the Pythagorean philosophers. But it forms an excellent summary of Porphyry's ethical views,

and the purpose for which it was written—to console his wife in his absence—gives it an additional interest. As far as I am aware, no English translation of this letter has as yet appeared; and I am therefore venturing to offer my own to the public, though I am deeply conscious of my inability worthily to perform this task. I can but hope that it may be of some use and interest to those who care to study the great minds of other creeds, in order to realise more fully than before the essential unity of truth.

Five editions of this letter have appeared, the first in 1816, by Cardinal Mai; the second by Orelli (1819); the third by Mai, in his collection *Classici Auctores* (1831); the fourth and fifth by Nauck, in the Teubner Classics (1860 and 1886). My translation has been made from Mai's text, but I have adopted many of the suggestive readings in the Teubner edition. I have also had access to an Italian translation by Chinazzi.

In the opinion of experts the Codex is not anterior to the fifteenth century, and perhaps is of a later date; it is preserved in a volume with several Greek pamphlets in the Ambrosian Library at Milan; and by permission of Dr. Antonio Ceriani my friend Signor E. Torelli Viollier was able to execute the photograph of the open volume exhibiting the

Codex which my publisher has reproduced as a frontispiece.

To all these I desire to offer my warmest thanks ; as well as to Dr. Garnett for his help and sympathy throughout the work, to Mr. R. D. Hicks of Trinity College, Cambridge, for most valuable assistance with the translation, and to Professor Postgate for several helpful suggestions.

PORPHYRY THE PHILOSOPHER
TO MARCELLA

PORPHYRY THE PHILOSOPHER TO MARCELLA

1. I CHOSE thee as my wife, Marcella, though thou wert the mother of five daughters and two sons, some of whom are still little children, and the others approaching a marriageable age; and I was not deterred by the multitude of things which would be needful for their maintenance. And it was not for the sake of having children that I wedded thee, deeming that the lovers of true wisdom were my children, and that thy children too would be mine if ever these should embrace right philosophy, when educated by us. Nor yet was it because a superfluity of riches had fallen either to thy lot or mine. For such necessaries as are ours must suffice us who are poor. Neither did I expect that thou wouldst afford me any ease through thy ministrations as I advanced in years, for thy frame is delicate, and more in need of care from others than fitted to succour or watch

over them. Nor yet did I desire other housewifely care from thee, nor sought I after honour and praise from those who would not willingly have undertaken such a burden for the mere sake of doing good. Nay, it was far otherwise, for through the folly of thy fellow-citizens, and their envy towards thee and thine, I encountered much ill-speaking, and contrary to all expectation, I fell into danger of death at their hands on your behalf.

2. For none of these causes did I choose another to be partner of my life, but there was a twofold and reasonable cause that swayed me. One part was that I deemed I should thus propitiate the gods of generation; just as Sokrates in his prison chose to compose popular music, for the sake of safety in his departure from life, instead of his customary labours in philosophy, so did I strive to propitiate the divinities who preside over this tragi-comedy of ours, and shrank not from celebrating in all willingness the marriage hymn, though I took as my lot thy numerous children, and thy straitened circumstances, and the malice of evil-speakers. Nor were there lacking any of those passions usually connected with a play —jealousy, hatred, laughter, quarrelling and anger; this alone excepted, that it was not with a view to ourselves but for the sake of others that we enacted this spectacle in honour of the gods.

3. Another worthier reason, in nowise resembling that commonplace one, was that I admired thee because thy disposition was suited to true philosophy ; and when thou wast bereaved of thy husband, a man dear to me, I deemed it not fitting to leave thee without a helpmeet and wise protector suited to thy character. Wherefore I drove away all who were minded to use insult under false pretence, and I endured foolish contumely, and bore in patience with the plots laid against me, and strove, as far as in my power lay, to deliver thee from all who tried to lord it over thee. I recalled thee also to thy proper mode of life, and gave thee a share in philosophy, pointing out to thee a doctrine that should guide thy life. And who could be a more faithful witness to me than thyself, for I should deem it shame to equivocate to thee, or conceal aught of mine from thee, or to withhold from thee (who honourest truth above all things, and therefore didst deem our marriage a gift of Heaven) a truthful relation from beginning to end of all that I have done with respect to and during our union.

4. Now had my business permitted me to remain longer in your country, it would have been possible for thee to still thy thirst with fresh and plentiful draughts from fountains close at hand, so that, not contenting thyself with as much of this gift as

would be requisite for ends of utility, thou couldst rejoice in easily supplying thyself at thy leisure with plentiful refreshment. But now the affairs of the Greeks requiring me, and the gods too urging me on, it was impossible for thee, though willing, to answer the summons, with so large a number of daughters attending thee. And I held it to be both foolish and wicked to cast them thus without thee among ill-disposed men. And now that I am compelled to delay here, though I cherish the hope of a speedy return, I would deem it right to warn thee to keep firm hold of those gifts thou didst receive in those ten months during which thou didst live with me, and not to cast away that thou already hast from desire and longing for more. As for me, I am making what haste I can to rejoin thee.

5. Yet considering the uncertainty of the future, in travelling I must, in sending thee consolation, lay upon thee commands. And I would say somewhat that this is more suitable for thee than to take care of thyself and thy house,

"And keep all things in safety,"

left behind as thou art, not unlike Philoktetes in the tragedy, suffering from his sore, though his sore was caused by a baleful serpent, thine by the

knowledge of the nature and extent of the descent to earth which has befallen our souls. Albeit the gods have not forsaken us, as the sons of Atreus forsook him, but they have become our helpers and have been mindful of us. Now seeing thou art hard beset in a contest, attended with much wrestling and labour, I earnestly beg thee to keep firm hold upon philosophy, the only sure refuge, and not to yield more than is fitting to the perplexities caused by my absence. Do not from desire for my instruction cast away what thou hast already received, and do not faint before the multitude of other cares that encompass thee, abandoning thyself to the rushing stream of outward things. Rather bear in mind that it is not by ease that men attain the possession of the true good, and practise thyself for the life thou expectest to lead by help of those very troubles which are the only opponents to thy fortitude that are able to disturb and constrain thee. As for plots laid against us, it is easy for those to despise them who are accustomed to disregard all that does not lie in our own power, and who deem that injustice rather recoils upon the doer than injures those who believe that the worst injury inflicted on them can cause them but little loss.

6. Now thou mayest console thyself for the absence of him who sustains thy soul, and is to thee father, husband, teacher, and kindred, yea, if

thou wilt, even fatherland, though this seems to offer a reasonable ground for unhappiness, by placing before thee as arbiter not feeling but reason. In the first place consider that, as I have said before, it is impossible that those who desire to be mindful of their return, should accomplish their journey home from this terrestrial exile pleasantly and easily, as through some smooth plain. For no two things can be more entirely opposed to one another than a life of pleasure and ease, and the ascent to the gods. As the summits of mountains cannot be reached without danger and toil, so it is not possible to emerge from the inmost depths of the body through pleasure and ease which drag men down to the body. For 'tis by anxious thought that we reach the road, and by recollection of our fall. But even if we encounter difficulties in our way, hardship is natural to the ascent, for it is given to the gods alone to lead an easy life. But ease is most dangerous for souls which have sunk to this earthly life, making them forgetful in the pursuit of alien things, and bringing on a state of slumber if we fall asleep, beguiled by alluring visions.

7. Now there are some chains that are of very heavy gold, but, because of their beauty, they persuaded women who in their folly do not perceive the weight, that they contribute to ornament, and thus got them to bear fetters easily. But

other fetters which are of iron compelled them to a knowledge of their sins, and by pain forced them to repent and seek release from the weight; while escape from the golden imprisonment, through the delight felt in it, often causes grievous woe. Whence it has seemed to men of wisdom that labours conduce to virtue more than do pleasures. And to toil is better for man, aye, and for woman too, than to let the soul be puffed up and enervated by pleasure. For labour must lead the way to every fair possession, and he must toil who is eager to attain virtue. Thou knowest that Herakles and the Dioskuri, and Asklepius and all other children of the gods, through toil and steadfastness accomplished the blessed journey to heaven. For it is not those who live a life of pleasure that make the ascent to the gods, but rather those who have nobly learnt to endure the greatest misfortunes.

8. I know full well that there could be no greater contest than that which now lies before thee, since thou thinkest that in me thou wilt lose the path of safety and the guide therein. Yet thy circumstances are not altogether unendurable, if thou cast from thee the unreasoning distress of mind which springs from the feelings, and deem it no trivial matter to remember those words by which thou wert with divine rites initiated into true philosophy, approving by thy deeds the fidelity

with which they have been apprehended. For it is a man's actions that naturally afford demonstrations of his opinions, and whoever holds a belief must live in accordance with it, in order that he may himself be a faithful witness to the hearers of his words. What was it then that we learnt from those men who possess the clearest knowledge to be found among mortals? Was it not this—that I am in reality not this person who can be touched or perceived by any of the senses, but that which is farthest removed from the body, the colourless and formless essence which can by no means be touched by the hands, but is grasped by the mind alone. And it is not from outward things that we receive those principles which are implanted in us. We receive only the keynote as in a chorus, which recalls to our remembrance those things which we received from the god who gave them us ere we set forth on our wanderings.

9. Moreover, is not every emotion of the soul most hostile to its safety? And is not want of education the mother of all the passions? Now education does not consist in the absorption of a large amount of knowledge, but in casting off the affections of the soul. Now the passions are the beginning of diseases. And vice is the disease of the soul; and every vice is disgraceful. And the disgraceful is opposed to the good. Now since the

divine nature is good, it is impossible for it to consort with vice, since Plato says it is unlawful for the impure to approach the pure. Wherefore even now we need to purge away all our passions, and the sins that spring therefrom. Was it not this thou didst so much approve, reading as it were divine characters within thee, disclosed by my words? Is it not then absurd, though thou art persuaded that thou hast in thee the saving and the saved, the losing and the lost, wealth and poverty, father and husband, and a guide to all true good, to pant after the mere shadow of a leader, as though thou hadst not within thyself a true leader, and all riches within thine own power? And this must thou lose and fly from, if thou descend to the flesh, instead of turning towards that which saves and is saved.

10. As for my shadow and visible image, as thou wast not profited by their presence, so now their absence is not hurtful if thou attempt to fly from the body. But thou wouldst meet with me in all purity, and I should be most truly present and associated with thee, night and day, in purity and with the fairest kind of converse which can never be broken up, if thou wouldst practise to ascend into thyself, collecting together all the powers which the body has scattered and broken up into a multitude of parts unlike their former unity to

which concentration lent strength. Thou shouldst collect and combine into one the thoughts implanted within thee, endeavouring to isolate those that are confused, and to drag to light those that are enveloped in darkness. The divine Plato too made this his starting-point, summoning us away from the sensible to the intelligible. Also if thou wouldst remember, thou wouldst combine what thou hast heard, and recall it by memory, desiring to turn thy mind to discourses of this kind as to excellent counsellors, and afterwards practising in action what thou hast learnt, bearing it in mind in thy labours.

11. Reason tells us that the divine is present everywhere and in all men, but that only the mind of the wise man is sanctified as its temple, and God is best honoured by him who knows Him best. And this must naturally be the wise man alone, who in wisdom must honour the Divine, and in wisdom adorn for it a temple in his thought, honouring it with a living statue, the mind moulded in His image. . . . . Now God is not in need of any one, and the wise man is in need of God alone. For no one could become good and noble, unless he knew the goodness and beauty which proceed from the Deity. Nor is any man unhappy, unless he has fitted up his soul as a dwelling-place for evil spirits. To the wise man God gives the authority of a god. And a man is

purified by the knowledge of God, and issuing from God, he follows after righteousness.

12. Let God be at hand to behold and examine every act and deed and word. And let us consider Him the author of all our good deeds. But of evil we ourselves are the authors, since it is we who made choice of it, but God is without blame. Wherefore we should pray to God for that which is worthy of Him, and we should pray for what we could attain from none other. And we must pray that we may attain after our labours those things that are preceded by toil and virtue; for the prayer of the slothful is but vain speech. Neither ask of God what thou wilt not hold fast when thou hast attained it, since God's gifts cannot be taken from thee, and He will not give what thou wilt not hold fast. What thou wilt not require when thou art rid of the body, that despise, but practise thyself in that thou wilt need when thou art set free, calling on God to be thy helper. Thou wilt need none of those things which chance often gives and again takes away. Do not make any request before the fitting season, but only when God makes plain the right desire implanted by nature within thee.

13. Hereby can God best be reflected, who cannot be seen by the body, nor yet by an impure soul darkened by vice. For purity is God's beauty, and His light is the life-giving flame of truth. Every

vice is deceived by ignorance, and turned astray by wickedness. Wherefore desire and ask of God what is in accordance with His own will and nature, well assured that, inasmuch as a man longs after the body and the things of the body in so far does he fail to know God, and is blind to the sight of God, even though all men should hold him as a god. Now the wise man, if known by only few, or, if thou wilt, unknown to all, yet is known by God, and is reflected by his likeness to Him. Let then thy mind follow after God, and let the soul follow the mind, and let the body be subservient to the soul as far as may be, the pure body serving the pure soul. For if it be defiled by the emotions of the soul, the defilement reacts upon the soul itself.

14. In a pure body where soul and mind are loved by God, words should conform with deeds : since it is better for thee to cast a stone at random than a word, and to be defeated speaking the truth rather than conquer through deceit ; for he who conquers by deceit is worsted in his character. And lies are witnesses unto evil deeds. It is impossible for a man who loves God also to love pleasure and the body, for he who loves these must needs be a lover of riches. And he who loves riches must be unrighteous. And the unrighteous man is impious towards God and his fathers, and transgresses against all men. And though he slay whole

hecatombs in sacrifice, and adorn the temples with ten thousand gifts, yet is he impious and godless, and at heart a plunderer of holy places. Wherefore we should shun all addicted to love of the body as godless and impure.

15. Do not associate with any one whose opinions cannot profit thee, nor join with him in converse about God. For it is not safe to speak of God with those who are corrupted by false opinion. Yea, and in their presence to speak truth or falsehood about God is fraught with equal danger. It is not fitting for a man who is not purified from unholy deeds to speak of God himself, nor must we suppose that he who speaks of Him with such is not guilty of a crime. We should hear and use speech concerning God as though in His presence. Godlike deeds should precede talk of God, and in the presence of the multitude we should keep silence concerning Him, for the knowledge of God is not suitable to the vain conceit of the soul. Esteem it better to keep silence than to let fall random words about God. Thou wilt become worthy of God if thou deem it wrong either to speak or do or know aught unworthy of Him. Now a man who was worthy of God would be himself a god.

16. Thou wilt best honour God by making thy mind like unto Him, and this thou canst do by virtue alone. For only virtue can draw the soul

upward to that which is akin to it. Next to God there is nothing great but virtue, yet God is greater than virtue. Now God strengthens the man who does noble deeds. But an evil spirit is the instigator of evil deeds. The wicked soul flies from God, and would fain that His providence did not exist, and it shrinks from the divine law which punishes all the wicked. But the wise man's soul is like God, and ever beholds Him and dwells with Him. If the ruler takes pleasure in the ruled, then God too cares for the wise man and watches over him. Therefore is the wise man blest, because he is in God's keeping. 'Tis not his speech that is acceptable to God, but his deed; for the wise man honours God even in his silence, while the fool dishonours Him even while praying and offering sacrifice. Thus the wise man only is a priest; he only is beloved by God, and knows how to pray.

17. The man who practises wisdom practises the knowledge of God; and he shows his piety not by continued prayers and sacrifices but by his actions. No one could become well-pleasing to God by the opinions of men or the vain talk of the Sophists. But he makes himself well-pleasing and consecrate to God by assimilating his own disposition to the blessed and incorruptible nature. And it is he who makes himself impious and displeasing to God, for God does not injure him (since the divine nature

can only work good), but he injures himself, chiefly through his wrong opinion concerning God. Not he who disregards the images of the gods is impious, but he who holds the opinions of the multitude concerning God. But do thou entertain no thought unworthy of God or of His blessedness and immortality.

18. The chief fruit of piety is to honour God according to the laws of our country, not deeming that God has need of anything, but that He calls us to honour Him by His truly reverend and blessed majesty. We are not harmed by reverencing God's altars, nor benefited by neglecting them. But whoever honours God under the impression that He is in need of him, he unconsciously deems himself greater than God. 'Tis not when they are angry that the gods do us harm, but when they are not understood. Anger is foreign to the gods, for anger is involuntary, and there is nothing involuntary in God. Do not then dishonour the divine nature by false human opinions, since thou wilt not injure the eternally blessed One, whose immortal nature is incapable of injury, but thou wilt blind thyself to the conception of what is greatest and chiefest.

19. Again thou couldst not suppose my meaning to be this when I exhort thee to reverence the gods, since it would be absurd to command this as though the matter admitted a question. And we do not worship Him only by doing or thinking this or

that, neither can tears or supplications turn God from His purpose, nor yet is God honoured by sacrifices nor glorified by plentiful offerings; but it is the godlike mind that remains stably fixed in its place that is united to God. For like must needs approach like. But the sacrifices of fools are mere food for fire, and the offerings they bring help the robbers of temples to lead their evil life. But, as was said before, let thy temple be the mind that is within thee. This must thou tend and adorn, that it may be a fitting dwelling for God. Yet let not the adornment and the reception of God be but for a day, to be followed by mockery and folly and the return of the evil spirit.

20. If, then, thou ever bear in mind that wheresoever thy soul walks and inspires thy body with activity, God is present and overlooks all thy counsels and actions, then wilt thou feel reverence before the unforgotten presence of the spectator, and thou wilt have God to dwell with thee. And even though thy mouth discourse the sound of some other thing, let thy thought and mind be turned towards God. Thus shall even thy speech be inspired, shining through the light of God's truth and flowing the more easily; for the knowledge of God makes discourse short.

21. But wheresoever forgetfulness of God shall enter in, there must the evil spirit dwell. For the

soul is a dwelling-place, as thou hast learnt, either of gods or of evil spirits. If the gods are present, it will do what is good both in word and in deed; but if it has welcomed in the evil guest, it does all things in wickedness. Whensoever, then, thou beholdest a man doing or rejoicing in that which is evil, know that he has denied God in his heart and is the dwelling-place of an evil spirit. They who believe that God exists and governs all things have this reward of their knowledge and firm faith: they have learnt that God has forethought for all things, and that there exist angels, divine and good spirits, who behold all that is done, and from whose notice we cannot escape. Being persuaded that this is so, they are careful not to fall in their life, keeping before their eyes the constant presence of the gods whence they cannot escape. And they have attained to a wise mode of life, and know the gods and are known by them.

22. On the other hand, they who believe that the gods do not exist and that the universe is not governed by God's providence, have this punishment: they neither believe themselves, nor yet do they put faith in others who assert that the gods exist, and that the universe is not directed by whirling motion void of reason. Thus they have cast themselves into unspeakable peril, trusting to an unreasoning and uncertain impulse in the events of

life ; and they do all that is unlawful in the endeavour to remove the belief in God. Assuredly such men are forsaken by the gods for their ignorance and unbelief. Yet they cannot flee and escape the notice of the gods or of justice their attendant, but having chosen an evil and erring life, though they know not the gods, yet are they known by them and by justice that dwells with the gods.

23. Even if they think they honour the gods, and are persuaded that they exist, yet neglect virtue and wisdom, they really have denied the divinities and dishonour them. Mere unreasoning faith without right living does not attain to God. Nor is it an act of piety to honour God without having first ascertained in what manner He delights to be honoured. If, then, He is gratified and won over by libations and sacrifices, it would not be just that while all men make the same requests they should obtain different answers to their prayers. But if there is nothing that God desires less than this, while he delights only in the purification of the mind, which every man can attain of his own free choice, what injustice could there be? But if the divine nature delights in both kinds of service, it should receive honour by sacred rites according to each man's power, and by the thoughts of his mind even beyond that power. It is not wrong to pray to God, since ingratitude is a grievous wrong.

24. No god is in fault for a man's wickedness, but the man who has chosen it for himself. The prayer which is accompanied by base actions is impure, and therefore not acceptable to God; but that which is accompanied by noble actions is pure, and at the same time acceptable.

There are four first principles that must be upheld concerning God—faith, truth, love, hope. We must have faith that our only salvation is in turning to God. And having faith, we must strive with all our might to know the truth about God. And when we know this, we must love Him we do know. And when we love Him we must nourish our souls on good hopes for our life, for it is by their good hopes good men are superior to bad ones. Let then these four principles be firmly held.

25. Next let these three laws be distinguished. First, the law of God; second, the law of human nature; third, that which is laid down for nations and states. The law of nature fixes the limits of bodily needs, and shows what is necessary to these, and condemns all striving after what is needless and superfluous. Now that which is established and laid down for States regulates by fixed agreements the common relations of men, by their mutual observance of the covenants laid down. But the divine law is implanted by the mind, for their

welfare, in the thoughts of reasoning souls, and it is found truthfully inscribed therein. The law of humanity is transgressed by him who through vain opinions knows it not, owing to his excessive love for the pleasures of the body. And it is broken and despised by those who, even for the body's sake, gain the mastery over the body. But the conventional law is subject to expediency, and is differently laid down at different times according to the arbitrary will of the prevailing government. It punishes him who transgresses it, but it cannot reach a man's secret thoughts and intentions.

26. The divine law is unknown to the soul that folly and intemperance have rendered impure, but it shines forth in self-control and wisdom. It is impossible to transgress this, for there is nothing in man that can transcend it. Nor can it be despised, for it cannot shine forth in a man who will despise it. Nor is it moved by chances of fortune, because it is in truth superior to chance and stronger than any form of violence. Mind alone knows it, and diligently pursues the search thereafter, and finds it imprinted in itself, and supplies from it food to the soul as to its own body. We must regard the rational soul as the body of the mind, which the mind nourishes by bringing into recognition, through the light that is in it, the thoughts within, which mind imprinted and engraved in the

soul in accordance with the truth of the divine law. Thus mind is become teacher and saviour, nurse, guardian and leader, speaking the truth in silence, unfolding and giving forth the divine law; and looking on the impressions thereof in itself it beholds them implanted in the soul from all eternity.

27. You must therefore first understand the law of nature, and then proceed to the divine law, by which also the natural law hath been prescribed. And if you make these your starting-point you shall never fear the written law. For written laws are made for the benefit of good men, not that they may do no wrong, but that they may not suffer it. Natural wealth is limited, and it is easy to attain. But the wealth desired of vain opinions has no limits, and is hard to attain. The true philosopher therefore, following nature and not vain opinions, is self-sufficing in all things; for in the light of the requirements of nature every possession is some wealth, but in the light of unlimited desires even the greatest wealth is but poverty. Truly it is no uncommon thing to find a man who is rich if tried by the standard at which nature aims, but poor by the standard of vain opinions. No fool is satisfied with what he possesses; he rather mourns for what he has not. Just as men in a fever are always thirsty through the

grievous nature of their malady, and desire things quite opposed to one another, so men whose souls are ill-regulated are ever in want of all things, and experience ever-varying desires through their greed.

28. Wherefore the gods, too, have commanded us to purify ourselves by abstaining from food and from love, bringing those who follow after piety within the law of that nature which they themselves have formed, since everything which transgresses this law is loathsome and deadly. The multitude, however, fearing simplicity in their mode of life, because of this fear, turn to the pursuits that can best procure riches. And many have attained wealth, and yet not found release from their troubles, but have exchanged them for greater ones. Wherefore philosophers say that nothing is so necessary as to know thoroughly what is unnecessary, and moreover that to be self-sufficing is the greatest of all wealth, and that it is honourable not to ask anything of any man. Wherefore, too, they exhort us to strive, not to acquire some necessary thing, but rather to remain of good cheer if we have not acquired it.

29. Neither let us accuse our flesh as the cause of great evils, nor attribute our troubles to outward things. Rather let us seek the cause of these things in our souls, and casting away every vain striving and hope for fleeting joys, let us become completely

masters of ourselves. For a man is unhappy either through fear or through unlimited and empty desire. Yet if he bridle these, he can attain to a happy mind. But in as far as thou art in want, it is through forgetfulness of thy nature that thou feelest the want. For hereby thou causest to thyself vague fears and desires. And it were better for thee to be content and lie on a bed of rushes than to be troubled though thou hast a golden couch and a luxurious table acquired by labour and sorrow. Whilst the pile of wealth is growing bigger, life is growing wretched.

30. Do not think it unnatural that when the flesh cries out for anything, the soul should cry out too. The cry of the flesh is, "Let me not hunger, or thirst, or shiver," and 'tis hard for the soul to restrain these desires. 'Tis hard, too, for it by help of its own natural self-sufficing to disregard day by day the exhortations of nature, and to teach it to esteem the concerns of life as of little account. And when we enjoy good fortune, to learn to bear ill fortune, and when we are unfortunate not to hold of great account the possessions of those who enjoy good fortune. And to receive with a calm mind the good gifts of fortune, and to stand firm against her seeming ills. Yea, all that the many hold good is but a fleeting thing.

31. But wisdom and knowledge have no part in

chance. It is not painful to lack the gifts of chance, but rather to endure the unprofitable trouble of vain ambition. For every disturbance and unprofitable desire is removed by the love of true philosophy. Vain is the word of that philosopher who can ease no mortal trouble. As there is no profit in the physician's art unless it cure the diseases of the body, so there is none in philosophy, unless it expel the troubles of the soul. These and other like commands are laid on us by the law of our nature.

32. Now the divine law cries aloud in the pure region of the mind: "Unless thou consider that thy body is joined to thee as the outer covering to the child in the womb and the stalk to the sprouting corn, thou canst not know thyself." Nor can any one know himself who does not hold this opinion. As the outer covering grows with the child, and the stalk with the corn, yet, when they come to maturity, both are cast away, thus too the body which is fastened to the soul at birth is not a part of the man. But as the outer covering was formed along with the child that it may come to being in the womb, so likewise the body was yoked to the man that he may come to being on earth. In as far as a man turns to the mortal part of himself, in so far he makes his mind incommensurate with immortality. And in as far as he refrains from sharing the feelings

of the body, in such a measure does he approach the divine. The wise man who is beloved of God strives and toils as much for the good of his soul as others do for the good of their body. He deems that he cannot become self-sufficing merely by remembering what he has heard, but strives by practising it to hasten on towards his duty.

33. Naked was he sent into the world, and naked shall he call on Him that sent him. For God listens only to those who are not weighed down by alien things, guarding those who are pure from corruption. Consider it a great help towards the blessed life if the captive in the thralls of nature takes his captor captive. For we are bound in the chains that nature has cast around us, by the belly, the throat and the other parts of the body, and by the use of these and the pleasant sensations that arise therefrom and the fears they occasion. But if we rise superior to their witchcraft, and avoid the snares laid by them, we have led our captor captive. Neither trouble thyself much whether thou be male or female in body, nor look on thyself as a woman, for I did not approach thee as such. Flee all that is womanish in the soul, as though thou hadst a man's body about thee. For what is born from a virgin soul and a pure mind is most blessed, since imperishable springs from imperishable. But

what the body produces is held corrupt by all the gods.

34. It is a great proof of wisdom to hold the body in thrall. Often men cast off certain parts of the body ; be thou ready for the soul's safety to cast away the whole body. Hesitate not to die for that for whose sake thou art willing to live. Let reason then direct all our impulses, and banish from us tyrannous and godless masters. For the rule of the passions is harder than that of tyrants, since it is impossible for a man to be free who is governed by his passions. As many as are the passions of the soul, so many cruel masters have we.

35. Strive not to wrong thy slaves nor to correct them when thou art angry. And before correcting them, prove to them that thou dost this for their good, and give them an opportunity for excuse. When purchasing slaves, avoid the stubborn ones. Accustom thyself to do many things thyself, for our own labour is simple and easy. And men should use each limb for the purpose for which nature intended it to be used. Nature needs no more. They who do not use their own bodies, but make excessive use of others, commit a twofold wrong, and are ungrateful to nature that has given them these parts. Never use thy bodily parts merely for the sake of pleasure, for it is far better to die than to obscure thy soul by in-

temperance . . . . correct the vice of thy nature. . . . . If thou give aught to thy slaves, distinguish the better ones by a share of honour . . . . for it is impossible that he who does wrong to man should honour God. But look on the love of mankind as the foundation of thy piety. And . . . .

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